

An Outing on Lake Alexandrina and the Coorong.

By J. Sutton.

A six days' trip, from 18th to 23rd October, 1930, by motor-launch, was made on Lake Alexandrina and the Coorong by a party consisting of Dr. A. S. Randell, Mr. E. S. Rymill, Dr. A. M. Morgan, and myself. We went to Goolwa by motor-cars on 18th, and left in Dr. Randell's motor-launch at 2.45 p.m. by way of the Goolwa Channel, then past Hindmarsh, Ram, Mundoo, Long, and Reedy No. 2 Islands, thence down the eastern channel, and anchored at 5.45 p.m. about half a mile from Gnurlung Point. The day had been very sultry, and late in the afternoon and during the night there was much thunder and lightning in the north-west. At 12.45 a.m. and again at 2.30 a.m. we experienced terrific wind squalls, which lasted on each occasion for the best part of an hour, and although the launch tugged very much at the anchor we were held safely. On the 19th, in the forenoon, Dr. Morgan and I went on Tauwithere Island, and in the afternoon the launch proceeded to Panmurung Point, off which we anchored. We went on shore and worked some swampy land and the scrub until 7 p.m. On the 20th we went down the Coorong as far as the Needles, 25 miles from the entrance at Pelican Point, but stopped at the Mud Bank on the way down.

The Needles consist of four islands—two, Goat and Needles, lie across the Coorong; Snake Island is beyond Needles Island, and Rabbit Island is beyond Snake. The first two islands are some 150 yards apart, but low limestone reefs project in parallel lines into the Coorong, almost at right angles from the islands, and narrow the channel to about 30 yards, and in that channel there are some hidden rocks. The depth of this channel was not sufficient for the draught of our launch (21 inches). The limestone reefs have fretted away greatly, and their surface is very hard and sharp. From Needles Island the homestead at McGrath's Flat could be seen, in a direct line three miles to the south-east. The main bird sanctuary in the Coorong begins at the Needles and extends for 12 miles to Stony Well on the mainland side and the Stone Jetty on the Peninsula side. The area is stated to be 24 square miles. On the 21st we went on Goat Island and Needles Island. On the former we found the Silver Gulls nesting. There were rabbits on both islands. We left the Needles on 21st and went as far as the Nine-mile Point, where we anchored for the night. On the 22nd we proceeded up the Coorong, then by the eastern channel to Deep Creek on

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Reedy Island No. 2, and later to Mundoo Channel, where we anchored opposite Lucerne Island for the night. Up to this the weather had been fairly good, but early in the morning of the 23rd rain began to fall, and continued until we reached Adelaide by motor-cars. After leaving Mundoo Channel we called at Dunn's Lagoon, and arrived at Goolwa at 11.40 a.m.

In an account of a launch trip to Younghusband Peninsula from 5th to 8th March, 1925 (see "S.A. Ornithologist," Vol. VIII, p. 75) I mentioned that the journey had to be curtailed through the continuous fouling of the propeller by the Swan Grass (*Zostera*), and that there were good growths of that grass at one of the spits. On this recent trip we saw no Swan Grass anywhere. Dr. Randell said that he had never seen the Coorong so free of it. The cause of its disappearance is a mystery, as it is said to live in salt water. The water in the Coorong turned out to be very salty, and it was very difficult to work up a lather with soap in the mornings at the Needles and Nine-mile Point. It seemed to me that the vegetation on Younghusband Peninsula had been overwhelmed considerably by the sand since 1925.

Birds calling at night were heard on 18th off Gnurlung Point—a Caspian Tern at 10.5 p.m., and a Spur-winged Plover at 10.10 p.m. On 22nd, in the Mundoo Channel, a Spur-winged Plover at 8 p.m. and a male Musk Duck whistled at 8.15 p.m.

In the accounts of two previous trips I stated there were no mosquitoes to pester us, but on this occasion they were in great numbers on Tauwitchere Island and on the swampy land at Panmuring Point.

No dead fish were seen, but, as before, there were great numbers of Mottled Shore-Crabs (*Paragrapsus gaimardii*) in all sizes dead on all the shores we visited.

The species of birds noted during the Lake and Coorong trip numbered 51, with a total of 21,265 individuals, as per list below. The numbers in parentheses after the name signify the individuals noted. All the members of the party contributed to the particulars as well as to the census.

All the places mentioned in this article can be found on reference to the maps in the "S.A. Ornithologist," Vol. VIII, p. 84; Vol. X, pp. 95 and 196.

Phaps elegans, Brush Bronzewing (1).—Was seen in the scrub at Nine-mile Point.

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Podiceps cristatus, Great Crested Grebe (1); *Podiceps ruficollis*, Little Grebe (2).

Phalacrocorax carbo (28).—None was seen in the Coorong.

Phalacrocorax varius, Pied Cormorant (429).—Were met with everywhere.

Pelecanus conspicillatus, Pelican (780).—Off Panmuring Point three Pelicans were fishing about 200 yards from the launch, when one bird uttered a short grunt. This was the first occasion that Dr. Morgan and myself had heard a Pelican make a noise, but Dr. Randell has heard a Pelican grunt on several occasions. He says that the grunt is composed of two notes, uttered quickly, the second one lower in pitch than the first—probably that is why we heard only one note, as we were so far away from the bird. The only times he has heard the grunt were either when he startled a bird by coming on it suddenly or when the birds were quarrelling. Whilst watching the birds fishing I noticed they swam side by side and made stabs with the bill, the head going under the water. When they had no catch the bill was slightly open as they slowly withdrew it from the water. If they caught anything they immediately raised the bill and pouch higher than the head in order to swallow the object. Dr. Morgan says that the water is ejected by the muscular contraction of the pouch. In rising from the water they use both feet at once, i.e. jump on the surface of the water whilst beating the wings at the same time, in order to get the impetus to rise. In that instance they were close to the shore with no wind blowing. At the Murray Mouth on 13th December, 1925, Dr. Morgan and I saw a number of Pelicans trying to rise, without a wind, from the almost level shore of Sir Richard Peninsula. The sight was most amusing, as each bird made many jumps with the two feet at once before rising. The appearance and action was just like a man jumping along in a sack race. On land against the wind the birds can rise at once. Once I saw nine birds flying line ahead close to the water. The first bird rose a few feet, then dropped down lower, and the other birds one after another did the same thing. It looked as if they were flying over a fence. Another fine sight was 18 birds about eight feet above the water flying line abreast. They came straight towards the launch, and kept on the same plane for a minute or two before turning away. When in the act of alighting the legs and feet are first dropped loosely down, then stuck out stiffly with the webs extended as they strike the water.

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Chlidonias leucopareia, Marsh Tern (436).—This Tern, when catching fish, appears to just touch the water; sometimes it strikes the water, but does not go under. Two specimens were taken at the Nine-mile Point, 21/10/1930. ♂, iris dark brown; bill black with reddish tinge at base; legs and feet dull dark red, nails black, soles bright red; inside mouth dull red; total length 26.5 cm.; spread of wings 65 cm.; weight 94 grammes; stomach contents, fishscales (nothing else recognizable); ♀, iris brown; bill dull dark red; legs and feet dark red, nails black, soles lighter; inside mouth dull red; total length 26 cm.; spread of wings 65 cm.; weight 117 grammes; stomach contents, fish-scales and a small fish. This bird was very fat.

Hydroprogne caspia, Caspian Tern (61).—Between 5.10 a.m. and 7 a.m. at our anchorage off Panmuring Point some of these Terns were fishing in the channel near the launch. The total number seen at one time was 17. The bird flies some 50 feet above the water, with its head and red beak directed downwards at right angles to the body. If it sights a fish it stops and hovers with quick wing-beats for a few seconds, then drops almost perpendicularly head first with wings drawn in. At about ten feet from the water the wings are closed tightly, and with the body then perpendicular it plunges completely under water, causing a splash some two feet in height. Sometimes it is closer to the water before this plunge, and in that case the splash is not so high, and the bird does not go completely under. Shortly after the bird rises from the water it gives a shudder, as Dr. Morgan terms it, and the drops of water are shaken off. The bird is usually successful in spearing the fish with its beak, and we saw many catches of a small silvery fish, probably mullet. Should another Caspian approach whilst the bird has the fish the captor utters a loud raspy call. The catch is eaten during the flight, the head of the fish being turned foremost before swallowing. Occasionally, after dropping some feet, the Tern realizes nothing is to be obtained, so it rises in a sweeping movement without going into the water.

Sterna bergii, Crested Tern (27).—This Tern usually goes under the water when diving for fish.

Sterna nereis, Fairy Tern (134).—This Tern goes under the water, even when it is shallow, when diving for fish.

Sterna sp., Terns (174).—These were not identified.

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Larus novae-hollandiae, Silver Gulls (1,442).—This species was nesting on Goat Island of the Needles. Nineteen nests were found on the highest part of the island amongst the shrubs and low trees. Six nests had three eggs each, one with two eggs, one with an egg and a stone about the same size, one with a stone in the cavity and an egg nine inches away. Ten nests were empty. The eggs were brownish olive in general colour with blackish spots. Seven dead Silver Gulls were seen. Over 200 Silver Gulls were about, and most of them were making a great noise whilst we were searching. Two young birds yellowish black in colour were seen with a flock.

Haematopus ostralegus, Pied Oyster-catcher (40).—All were seen about the Coorong, twenty of them at Goat and Needles Islands. They were chiefly in pairs, and one bird of a pair would fly towards us calling loudly "Pip-a-pip-a-pip-a-pip." Although a good search was made, no nest or young birds were found.

Haematopus unicolor, Sooty Oyster-catcher (2).—Were seen along the Coorong.

Lobibyx novae-hollandiae, Spur-winged Plover (36).

Pluvialis dominicus, Eastern Golden Plover (2).—These were flushed from the point of the reef at Goat Island (Needles). They had remained there after a flock of 19 Greenshanks had flown away.

Charadrius cucullatus, Hooded Dotterel (2).—These were seen on the "Mud Bank" in the Coorong.

Charadrius ruficapillus, Red-capped Dotterel (93).—When we anchored off the Mud Bank and scanned the shore with our field-glasses Dr. Morgan noticed what he thought was a Red-capped Dotterel sitting on a nest about 100 yards away on a rise about a foot high on the sandy plain. We others could not sight it. We landed, walked to the spot (the bird ran away as soon as we landed), and found the nest with two eggs in it. On the side of the cup nearest to the wind there was a miniature ridge of sand about an inch high, probably blown against the bird when on the nest.

Charadrius sp., Dotterel (2).—Could not be identified.

Cladorhynchus leucocephalus, Banded Stilt (1).—Was seen on Tauwitchere Island.

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Recurvirostra novae-hollandiae, Red-necked Avocet (218).—Sixteen were seen near Panmurung Point and 202 at Reedy Island No. 2.

Numenius cyanopus, Eastern Curlew (131).—Ten were seen on Reedy Island No. 2, 84 at Panmurung Point, 32 along the Coorong, three in the Mundoo Channel, and two on Hindmarsh Island.

Tringa nebularia, Greenshank (49).—Twenty-seven of them were seen along the Coorong.

Waders sp. (66).—Six flocks of birds larger than Sandpipers were seen, but were not identified.

Erolia testacea, Curlew Sandpiper (30).—Two specimens were taken at the Mud Bank, 20/10/1930, bills black; irides very dark brown; legs and feet olive brown; inside bills black. ♂—total length 20.5 cm.; spread of wings 41 cm.; weight 55 grammes, stomach contents. sand and part of a small crustacean. ♀—total length 20.5 cm.; spread of wings 39.5 cm.; weight 50 grammes; stomach contents, sand and some very small molluscs.

Erolia ruficollis, Red-necked Stint (373); *Erolia acuminata*, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (589).

Stints and Sandpipers sp. (14,231).—These represent 25 flocks which were seen during the trip, but could not be identified as to the species. Some were counted, but the majority were estimated. On arriving at Deep Creek on 22nd October we landed and walked to the north-west end of Reedy Island No. 2, from which a shallow sandy spit jutted out for many hundred yards to the west, most of it covered with very shallow water. As far out as we could see, the place was dotted thickly with birds, chiefly Waders. We sat down at the edge of the samphire for half an hour and watched the birds' movements. Curlew and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and Red-necked Stints were in the majority, and hundreds were feeding in the damp sand, many as close as 30 yards to us. Sometimes those near us would flush, and on a few occasions the whole immense flock would rise and settle again in a minute or two and continue feeding. If a hundred or so feeding near us flew away, another lot would soon arrive and begin to feed. We estimated there were over 7,000 of these species on and about the spit. Unfortunately, at some distance out there was a mirage, and although we could see lines of birds we were unable

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to identify them except in one case, when 202 Red-necked Avocets flew in towards us out of the mirage in small parties. There was one line about 100 yards long of black-looking birds, standing thickly together, but unrecognizable in the mirage. The other species identified there were Pelicans, Black Swans, Silver Gulls, Mountain Ducks, Spur-winged Plovers, Greenshank, Black Cormorant, Marsh Tern, and Red-capped Dotterels.

Egretta alba, White Egret (5).—Three were seen in the Mundoo Channel, one on Hindmarsh Island, and one at Dunn's Lagoon.

Notophox novae-hollandiae, White-faced Heron (15).

Cercopsis novae-hollandiae, Cape Barren Goose (3).—Were seen on Long Island.

Chenopsis atrata, Black Swan (154).—In the Coorong an adult pair with four cygnets were seen.

Casarca tadornoides, Mountain Duck (58).—In the Goolwa Channel near Clayton and in midstream we saw an adult pair with 11 ducklings. The parents flushed and flew about 50 yards, then the ducklings dived and seemed to disappear. The parents, however, made no attempt to fly in the direction that the young had taken whilst we were in view.

Anas superciliosa, Black Duck (4).—One at Panmuring Point, one at Pelican Point, and two in the Coorong.

Querquedula castanea, Chestnut Teal (2).—Were seen in the Coorong.

Querquedula gibberifrons, Grey Teal (147).—Twenty of these were seen in the Coorong.

Nyroca australis, White-eyed Duck or Hardhead (3).—Were seen in the Coorong.

Biziura lobata, Musk Duck (32).—Twenty-five were seen in the Coorong, one flock containing thirteen birds. Early in the morning off Panmuring Point Dr. Randell drew my attention to a single fairly-long whistling note which he said was made by a male Musk Duck. That call I had never heard before. The Musk Duck was about 100 yards away, close to an islet about a quarter of an acre in extent and covered in vegetation some ten feet in height, chiefly lignum bushes. The male bird was swimming round in short circles clockwise, and kicking out water with his feet, the splash from the left foot being slightly larger than that from the right foot. Whilst acting thus the

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whistling note was occasionally given. Several times afterwards I heard the whistle, and on looking with the field-glasses saw the bird going through the same performance. The only noise I had previously heard from a male Musk Duck was a sound like "plongk," which I understood was made by the feet when the bird was splashing round.

Circus approximans, Swamp Harrier (8); *Falco cenchroides*, Nankeen Kestrel (9).

Chalcites basalis, Horsfield Bronze Cuckoo (1).—Was seen on Reedy Island No. 2.

Hirundo neoxena, Welcome Swallow (10).—When we were anchored over half a mile from the shore off Gnurlung Point one of these birds came to the launch at 7.20 a.m., and at 7.50 a.m. a second bird appeared. One was an immature bird. They stayed for hours feeding about and resting on the boat. One bird was with us on the following morning when we were off Panmuring Point, but left when we got near the entrance to the Coorong. At the Needles two adult birds came around the launch at 6.35 a.m., but remained only a short while.

Whilst in the dinghy off Gnurlung Point a Welcome Swallow was seen to fly from a fisherman's guide-stick or beacon. This was made of a stem or branch of a tree, and projected about three feet above the water. On top of this stick an empty petrol-tin with the top knocked off had been placed with the opening downwards. It was found that at the top of the stick inside the tin a fork had been left, and in the fork was the nest which contained four eggs. As the nearest point of land was at least half a mile away, it would be interesting to know if the hatching was successful and how the young birds fared afterwards. A Welcome Swallow flew out from a similar tin on a fisherman's beacon about half a mile from the shore of Reedy Island No. 2, but we did not go to that beacon.

Grallina cyanoleuca, Magpie-Lark (3).—Were heard calling—one at Nine-mile Point at 5.35 a.m., one in the Mundoo Channel, and one at Dunn's Lagoon.

Epthianura albifrons, White-fronted Chat (12).—In the afternoon of 21st October a bird of this species was met with in midstream south of the Nine-mile Point crossing the Coorong from the mainland to Younghusband Peninsula. The shortest distance from shore to shore there is 1 mile 10 chains. In the afternoon of 22nd October a bird was met with in midstream

SUTTON—*An Outing on Lake Alexandrina and the Coorong.* near Long Island crossing the Lake from the mainland. The shortest distance from shore to shore there is 1 mile 30 chains.

Dasyornis broadbenti, Rufous Bristle-Bird (10).—Two were noted in the scrub at Panmuring Point and eight at Nine-mile Point.

Megalurus gramineus, Little Grassbird (14).—Eleven were noted on Tauwitchere Island, one in the lignum in the islet off Panmuring Point, and two on Reedy Island No. 2. Two nests were found on Tauwitchere Island. One was three and a half feet from the ground in a lignum bush, and contained four eggs, slightly incubated; the other, which was not complete, was in a samphire and 18 inches from the ground.

Cisticola exilis, Golden-headed Fantail-Warbler (17).—Sixteen were noted on Tauwitchere Island, and one was heard early in the morning on Mundoo Island. Nest on Tauwitchere Island. The birds were singing whilst in the air and when sitting on the bushes and low shrubs. For some time a nest could not be found. As the birds were continually resting on lignum-bushes, all those bushes in the neighbourhood were searched without result. We walked back about 50 yards and watched one bird which was flying round in fairly large circles about 150 feet up singing very frequently what I make out as "Fizzy, chenkenk." After some five minutes the bird descended almost perpendicularly on to a low shrub, Seablite (*Suaeda australis*). Dr. Morgan found the nest, which was a foot from the ground and two inches from the top of the shrub. There were three eggs, slightly incubated.

Malurus cyaneus, Superb Blue Wren (1).—Was calling from a lignum thicket on Reedy Island No. 2. Near this spot a bird uttered a scolding call a few times, but no inducement by way of "kissing" could induce it to appear. The call sounded like that of a *Sericornis*: If it were that genus, the species most likely to be found there would be *S. frontalis*, White-browed Scrub-Wren.

Zosterops halmaturina, Grey-backed Silver-eye (7).—Were seen on Reedy Island No. 2.

Meliphaga virescens, Singing Honeyeater (37).—Were noted at Panmuring, Gnurlung, and Nine-mile Points, Goat and Needles Island, and Dunn's Lagoon.

Acanthagenys rufogularis, Spiny-checked Honeyeater (37).—Were noted at Panmuring and Nine-mile Points, Goat and Needles Islands.

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Anthus australis, Pipit (2).—Were seen on Tauwitche Island.

Corvus coronoides, Raven (117).—Forty-four of these were seen on Younghusband Peninsula and 46 on Mundoo Island.

Cracticus torquatus, Grey Butcher-Bird (2).—One was heard at Panmuring Point and one on the mainland near Needles Island.

Gymnorhina hypoleuca, White-backed Magpie (25).—Twelve of these were seen along the Coorong (five on Goat Island, Needles).

Unidentified (1,150).—These represent five flocks of birds which were seen on 18th October. Three flocks, calculated at 1,000 birds in all, were seen near sundown flying high northwards down the Tauwitche Channel. They were over a mile away from us. Later, when almost dark, two flocks of 75 largish birds each flew past the launch when at anchor off Gnurlung Point.

On the journey to and from Adelaide 18 species, totalling 102 individuals, were noted. Those species marked with an asterisk were seen also on the launch trip. *Brush Bronzewing (1); *Silver Gull (15); *White-faced Heron (1); Adelaide Rosella (*Platycercus adalaidae*) (9); Red-backed Parrot (*Psephotus haematomotus*) (2); Laughing Kookaburra (*Dacelo gigas*) (1); *Welcome Swallow (1); Tree-Martin (*Hylochelidon nigricans*) (1); Willie Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) (2); Jacky Winter (*Microeca fascinans*) (1); *White-fronted Chat (4); Yellow-tailed Thornbill (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*) (1); White-plumed Honeyeater (*Meliphaga penicillata*) (2); Yellow-winged Honeyeater (*Meliornis novae-hollandiae*) (25); Noisy Miner (*Myzantha melanocephala*) (5); Red Wattle-Bird (*Anthochaera carunculata*) (1); *Raven (4); *White-backed Magpie (26).